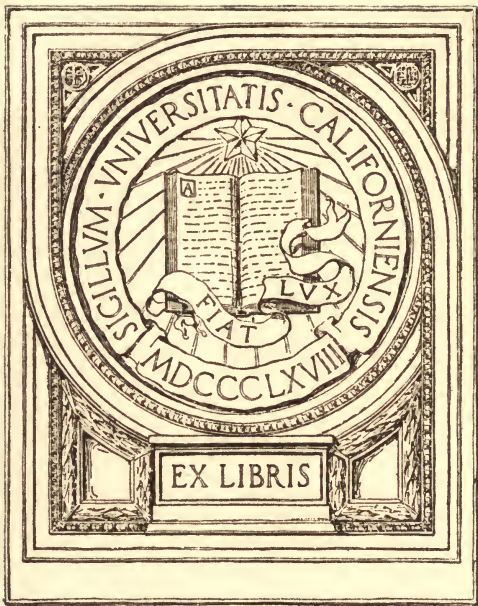


FIRE AND WINE

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FIRE AND WINE

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BY

JOHN GOULD FLETCHER



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TO
ANYONE READING THIS BOOK

*You, miracle marvellous and divine,
Whose eyes upon this page now fall,
Have linked your soul so unto mine
That I must praise you most of all.*

*I care not, be you young or old :
I heed not if you love or hate :
Reading my rhymes may leave you cold,
You read them yet, at any rate.*

*Then, after, with each further rhyme,
I feel your hands that push the pen ;
Your breath that falls to mark the time,
My songs shall rise the higher, then !*

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BOOK I. FIRE

SPRING LOVE

ERE I can love, the chill rain spoils my rose :
Ere I can weep, the sun shines forth again :
Ere I can rage, more beautifully it glows :
Ere I can kiss, my kisses cost me pain.

O, I will turn my back and cease from chase ;
This Love's a shifting wind that will not sit :
But ere I turn she buffets me in the face,
And flies before I howl with sting of it.

I, too, am April-mooded, so I grieve,
And pity Love her tantrums and her whims :
She is unloved, an orphan, and afraid ;
And Winter's sneering wrinkle slow dislimns.

At last, I have her ; lo, a half-slipped kiss !
A flower careless to the hillside tossed :
There is no word to speak its thrilling bliss.
But in the night comes Winter's latest frost.

MIDSUMMER LOVE

MIDSUMMER noontide in a sky of brass :

The sun like flame licks at the blistered earth,
And shrivels up the blades of withering grass ;
Like Love that slays the love it brought to birth.

I hate you even as dying men hate death ;
I hate you as the damned must hate their fire ;
But I am sick and damned, and 'spite my breath,
I hate you with an agony of desire.

I love you and your sterile, arid kiss.
You cry to me intolerable depths of shame :
Grant but one anguish, then, to equal this,
And I will sleep, cradled in scarlet flame.

Earth's loveliness the raging sun destroyed
In vainly striving to sear the brazen sky :
Pour forth my cup of wormwood unalloyed,
And trample on my tears, and let me die.

AUTUMNAL LOVE

AT last I reach with weary strife
And endless wrestling with the gale,
The autumnal harbour of my life ;
And in that harbour yours the sail.

I am too old, at last, to care ;
It is the end : be this my home,
Where I may watch the red leaves flare
Before they fall and rot to loam.

Safe by the hearth, I shall forget
The intolerable loneliness I knew
Out there amidst the sea's wild fret :
That dread and glorious sea of blue.

MIDWINTER LOVE

WINTER'S without
With his mad rout !
 A red wind pours
 Through windows and doors ;
It laughs, this flayed
Naked thing afraid ;
 It clutches at leaves,
 It screeches, it grieves.
Winter's without !

But we together within bear in our bodies the fire
Of love, the breath of the world, a flame leaping
 higher and higher ;
On the perilous coasts of despair, a red beacon of
 desire.

Winter's without !
 In night's dark peace
 Crawl serpents that freeze
With their rattling scales,
 And their stony eyes,
The water that fails
 And the grass that dies.
Winter's without !

But we watch steadily between us, between our
 clasped hands in the gloom,

Love's perfect and motionless beauty, a flower that
fills the room
With its white glory unchanging, its never-passing
perfume.

Winter's without !
Afloat and aflow
In the dawn, lo,
The wet white snow !
Winter's without !

'Tis day. Love is weak as a snowflake and cold as a
frozen tear :

Perchance in some distant spring of dreams it may
melt, then, and disappear

Beyond the ice slow crawling or the raving winds
thin and red.

Meanwhile, in a drifting tomb of the snow we lie
together dead.

I CANNOT LOVE YOU

I CANNOT love you, but for an instant only :

Each hour your love and mine must wake anew ;
One moment's weakness and the charm is shattered,
Whether I fail or you.

And since life is a constant change and tumult,
Since low comes out of high as day from night,
We shall love, we shall hate, and we shall find
together
Grey days of little light.

And I shall seek in love a thousand others,
And I shall long to kill you, lovely one,
And I shall torture you until you hate me,
And we shall both make hells beneath the sun !

We shall part and we shall once again unite us,
Ugly with tears, broken with time and care,
And loathing, loving, we shall lie together
To consecrate our uttermost despair.

Love is a fire that leaps this hour between us,
And it will fade till ashes quench its glow,
Unless dumb death will hear our prayer, in pity,
And take us from decline of loving now !

LACKING YOUR LOVE

LACKING your love, my heart is a darkened house :
The dust lies thick on the carpetless, creaking floors :
The walls are covered with green mould : a cricket
 ironically chirps ;
And the shattered windows let in the long autumn
 rains.

O grant me your love, press kiss upon kiss on my
 lips,
Till I can forget the dark ruin and havoc that time
 has made ;
Till asworn in your arms, my empty heart dreams of
 bright halls,
Lit up with curious lamps, and with dancers awirl.

IN THE YEAR THAT IS PAST

IN the year that is past and forgotten, I have
learned

Naught but increasing bitterness with life ;
My studies disillusionment have earned,
And I have paid with failure for my strife.

For no good, to no purpose have I striven ;
Life shaped in me an instrument of pain :
Now Spring, a great bird, sweeps along high heaven,
And the old wound breaks open, once again.

I do not know if Love his scorn is showing,
I do not know if Love a grief must prove,
I do not know Love's dreadful burden growing,
I only know I starve and thirst for love.

If Love do choose from every joy to sever
My soul, I care not, so he bring me still
Kisses that burn and tempt to kiss for ever :
I'd sell my soul for but one hour in Hell !

Though Death and Life and Wisdom be a-calling,
And even Folly counsels, " Let Love be " ;
Yet into that fierce furnace-fire I'm falling,
And may I be consumed there utterly.

COULD MY SOUL DREAM

COULD my soul dream of anything now for the rest
of my life,
I would dream that you and I in the twilight were
one :
That silence were ever about us, and we were
alone,
Enclosed by great hills from the echoes of tumult
and strife.

In my arms I would hold you, as in the stillness out
there
The twilight-tide tragically ebbcd, while I in my
bliss
Would kiss all your beauty which you would
permit me to kiss,
Would taste with my lips eyes, breast, hands, feet,
and hair.

O yield me a moment thus, I will pay you its worth :
Give over the rest to serve the world's laughter
and scorn,
Bid infinite darkness descend without hope of a
morn !
I am clay in your hands. I shall never dream more
upon earth.

EYES

Your shining eyes make laughter of the night :
The lights reflected dance therein, my eyes
Drink of their rhythm-dazzling ecstasies.
Your shining eyes make laughter of the night.

I am as one who plunges in a sea
'Mid little waves that clash and splash and fight.
Half mocking me, yet half caressing me,
Your shining eyes make laughter of the night.

Your shining eyes make laughter of the night :
On that deep laughter I am borne along ;
A ripple, a swirl of lights, a clash of song . . .
Your shining eyes make music of the night.

HANDS

THERE is great mystery, my love,
In the movements of your hands.
They glide upwards, like the sun,
In silent benediction ;
They glide downwards gradually,
Like dark retreating tides of sea :
They whirl and twirl and weep and leap,
And around them my pale rose meditations sleep.
Over them hovers still the dense
Mysterious scent of frankincense :
And when their fingers together move
 Over long keyboards of old clavichords,
I am consumed with a dance of love ;
 And when they are still I have no more words.
There is great mystery, my love,
In the movements of your hands.

MYSTIC UNION

I TASTE the sultry beauty of your mouth :
 'Tis like a scarlet poppy in the sun.
 Its sleepy passion has my strength undone,
And I am lost in vague dreams of the South.

The scented soft dark tangle of your hair
 Is like the shade of sighing cypress thrown
 On marble terraces where, one by one,
Gold glints are aimlessly drifting, here and there.

Yet in my soul I feel a vague disquiet :
 A lofty melancholy in the sun.
Stilled are my heartbeats, stilled my pulses' riot,
 I dream. Are we apart or are we one ?

SONG IN THE DESERT

UNDER the sun the dry sands bake,
The long day slips to afternoon ;
Song in the desert do thou make,
In the dark tent, a sleepy tune.

All through the night the land will be white,
Jackals will bark, far-off and low ;
The moon will be in her fourteenth night ;
Sing then a faded song of woe !

And if the scented stillness holds
One kiss for me, untasted yet,
All other things I would forget :
All but the dream of your hair's dark folds.

LOVE AND SUSPICION

You squeeze me in your arms the while your eyes
 Hungrily seek, fierce woman, on my face
 Close-hid deceits, brief mocking smiles, to trace :
For you have guessed that you have lost your prize.

But I care not, for all my enterprise
 Is sending such thoughts through your brain
 achase ;
 For thereby do I gain the crowning grace
Of all your splendid savage witcheries.

Seize me and keep me ever for your own,
 So that my love flames in you like a star :
But if you dim its ray, be sure some one
 Shall lure me from your side, and out afar :
This shadowy terror I set on you now,
Leaves but love's perfect lustre on your brow !

THE END OF LOVE

O, I AM weary of Love,
Of Love with the broken wings,
Of Love with the eyelids bound :
Whose temple is shut and still,
Alone on a hidden hill,
Far above any sound.

There is a little pool,
And the trailing leaf-sprays cool
Dip into it, all day.
It whispers to me of rest,
And a slumbering Naiad's breast :
There will I sink, and stay.

THE ICY WATERS

HE who has plunged in some deep sullen ocean,
But reaches shore again, whence he was long afar,
Keeps yet its icy waters in his heart.

Thus, I loved long ago; but now, when love comes
calling,
It seems, though near, like some dim, distant peak
That the eyes, ranging southward, 'mid blue mists
vainly seek.

The throbbing pulses of my heart, tremendous,
No longer lift the blood to my desires.
The engine's still and cold are all the fires.

Both pain and fear I feel: false hopes yet lure me,
But of the old joy dead I know no more a part:
For the dark bitter waters grip my heart.

IN THE SHADOW OF A PINE

Your life is like a pine's soft shadow cast
On the green sliding surface of Life's stream ;
The hours vanish and the stream runs fast,
The sun sinks, and the shadow is a dream.

And I who rest beneath your sloping boughs,
Woman beautiful and sombre, I have come
Voyaging down the stream from some far home
I furl the sails and ease the storm-strained bows,

And then I sit beneath your shade. Aloft
You whisper old silly and soothing rhymes ;
You touch my fingers with your needles soft,
The while the afternoon beats slumbrous chimes.

But soon, the ancient voyage I resume,
Soon, the fierce stream must call me forth again ;
Soon, I leave needle-roofed and carpeted room
To slip down to the veiled and lonely main.

I bear your magic music with me yet ;
On what wave tossed, what yellow beach upcast,
Its melancholy smile cannot forget :
Its whirling, throbbing, sobbing are not past :

The shadow of the pine was on me cast.

A PRAYER ANSWERED

ONE time I saw the temple gates in thunder
Roll open, clanging, and to me alone ;
And there within, a marble shape of wonder,
The Goddess on her throne.

But when my soul towards that threshold polished
Moved challenging and swiftly, free from care,
The doors rolled to, the glory was demolished,
And so—I knew despair !

Now since no Goddess-vision of desiring
Nor even any mortal comes my way,
My hated honour and my long aspiring
I cast from me to-day :

It is enough to me that you are woman ;
I ask no further, better thing than this :
Be warm and soft and treacherous and human,
But grant me of your bliss.

I want no finer wealth, no brighter glory,
Than your dark eyes and your entangling hair,
As for the Goddess, 'twas an empty story,
And she a hag, I swear !

A million women stand without the portal :
Their eyes and lips invite me, unafraid.
One of the million now I make immortal :
“ In *you* my choice is made ! ”

And as I seize her, lo, those gates asunder !
Before them stands a marble shape at rest. . . .
There leaps, a dream of crowning woe and wonder,
The Goddess, to my breast.

AT PARTING

I GAVE to you a day of love,
And more than this you shall not have :
Although for ever you beseech,
Although for ever you do crave.

Vain is your asking, vain your strife,
For on two ways our thoughts now fall :
You are a miser of your life,
I am in all things prodigal.

With other women I must prove
If in my loving well I chose ;
Or if all women are divine,
Each rose a perfect rose.

And you, if you would worthy be
Of my great love that storms the sky,
Must force all men to bow the knee
So they can naught deny.

Part we in hope then, not in tears ;
Be each content with one wild day.
Not all the winged clamorous years
Shall sweep its thought away !

THE MATING

I AM content to take you as you are,
As such I think you answer every test.
I'll seek no more, for I have wandered far
And you are only woman, like the rest.

As well as any other will you do,
As ill as any other you were made.
I am not much to boast on too, you know.
Ask little, then, and let it be a trade.

Though love's a soiled and hard and withered thing
Cast on a rubbish-heap of worn-out days,
To bear the rains and bleak winds of the spring :
'Tis all we have, 'tis all we need to praise.

I'll look down in the cellars of my heart
For those old casks, long-broached, of love and hate,
Perhaps some lees are left : if so, take part.
Such wedding-feast does fortune set, O mate !

LOVE'S MEMORY FADING

ONE eve within a garden rich in roses

We kissed, how many times I dare not tell :
A secret 'tis that nothing now discloses,
Although the wind knows well.

The words we said, the plaints and sighs we uttered,

That hour of madness in the darkening shade,
Perhaps the fountain in its plash has muttered,
Perhaps the memory's strayed.

My memory, too, within me flickers palely

Like an old lantern that Time slowly closes.
O, what is love that it should pass so frailly
From out that little garden rich in roses ?

LOVE'S MEMORY FORGOTTEN

You are no more to me than a dream-ghost flying
Who, so I dreamed, cast on me one wild look :
Or the stale perfume of a flower dying
Slowly, within a book.

My memory of you fades out like a figure
Seen far upon a road at late twilight :
A tiny silhouette in the red distance,
Soon lost upon the night.

I could remember you better were I sober,
I could feel on my lips the soft stir of your breath :
But there is fire on the hills, wine in October,
And in the valleys, death.

THE END OF DESIRE

ALL my dreams have brought me pain,
All my hopes have fallen to dust :
Happiness I strove to gain,
All I got was fresh disgust.

Every pleasure has been brief,
Granted but to tempt anew ;
And the strife they cost, the grief,
Now too late I learn to rue.

Through the wilderness of years
I have followed vain desire.
Slowly fall the rain's cold tears :
It is night. Put out the fire.

THE FINAL FUTILITY

I THINK I could love you were it not for those ghosts
Who stand in the dusk of my heart like shadowy
hosts.

They have woven between my sight and the
dazzling stream

Of things that are, a pale grey mist of dream :

So that no more I see reality,

But only some memory of time gone by.

I think I could love you were but my heart and my
sight

Empty, new-swept, and open to the light.

I think I could love you, you I have never known,

But I am to you as a mossy shape of stone

On which for a moment you leaned, without feeling
at all

The dark ghosts weeping within, in a crape-hung
hall :

Motionless, cold I was ; so you hurried away,

While I abide lethargically that day

When beneath grey jets from cold fountains of
alabaster

My heart shall crumble to dust, as if it were plaster.

BOOK II. WINE

TO MY MOTHER

Your body bore me : it has mouldered long,
I, like your dust, am blown along the wind.
Dead dust of ruin, striving life to find
In frozen temples, made of chiselled song !

Your brain gave mine the light : I bear it yet.
It flickers palely through the long dark rains
On the steep road of human wrongs and pains ;
It flickers, that my tears may fall in it.

Your soul has passed : it rests aloof, apart,
Inhabiting freely cool dark realms of space.
It knows me not : yet from it, by your grace,
I draw the song, the mad song of my art.

THE VOWELS

(*To Leon Bakst*)

A LIGHT and shade, E green, I blue, U purple and
yellow, O red,

All over my soul and song your lambent variations
are spread.

A, flaming caravans of day advancing with stately
art

Through pale, ashy deserts of grey to the shadowy
dark of the heart ;

Barbaric clangor of cataracts, suave caresses of sails,
Caverned abyssms of silence, assaults of infuriate
gales ;

Dappled vibrations of black and white that the
bacchanal valleys track ;

Candid and waxlike jasmine, amaranth sable black.

E, parakeets of emerald shrieking perverse in the
trees,

Iridescent and restless chameleons tremulous in the
breeze,

Peace on the leaves, peace on the sea-green sea,

Ethiopian timbrels that tinkle melodiously :

I, Iris of night, hyacinthine, semi-green,

Intensity of sky and of distant sea dimly seen,

Chryselephantine image, Athena violet-crowned,

Beryl-set sistra of Isis ashiver with infinite sound :

Bells with amethyst tongues, silver bells, E and I,
Tears that drip on the wires, Æolian melody !

U, torrid bassoons and flutes that murmur without
repose,

Butterflies, bumblebees, buzzing about a hot rose ;
Upas-flower bursting, thunder, furnaces, sunset,
lagoon ;

Muted tunes of the autumn, ruby, purple, maroon :
O, orange surface of bronze, topaz-spotted brocade,
Sorrow and pomp of the Orient, colour and odour
and shade,

Ebony and onyx corollas opening to the sun ;
O, lotus-glory Olympian, glory of God that is One !
O, crimson clarion horn that echoes on in the bold
Old omnipotence of power ; O, rosy glow of gold !
These are the miracles and I make them day and
night :

O red, U purple and yellow, I blue, E green, A
black and white.

THE THREE TRANSFORMATIONS OF POETRY

I AM the smith of words, lord of cold torrents of
tone

That like flags tossed to and fro, undulate wide
from my lips.

A fluid mosaic, each letter a luminous stone,
A stalactite grotto, all over which the light drips.

I am the anvil of moods: slave of the fulminate
world

That, like a prismatic kaleidoscope, leaps instan-
taneously through

My soul: flamboyant flamingoes 'gainst torpid
tortoises hurled:

Chrome corollas confused with corallas chysoprased-
blue.

I am the iron of thought, the sword of singing
enchased.

Let the dark clouds roll northward, the blood-red
sunset pass!

I see aloft in the sky green gargoyles interlaced
Leering or scowling or dreaming from cathedrals
of steel and of glass.

THE HOSTS OF SONG

THROUGH day and night and on through many days
Ever I seek sensations rude and strong.
Like leaves or winds or waves or clouds or rays
My hosts of song stream endlessly along.

Beyond the keenest joys, beyond the realms of air,
Beyond infinite peace where ended is all care,
Beyond the dark abyss of the most vile despair,
My hosts of song stream endlessly along.

Sometimes they are a deep and dark-blue pool,
Sometimes a torrent harsh and terrible,
Sometimes a swamp of ennui cold and dull ;
But each with all my heart and soul is full.
The infinite only is my bound and rule :
Stream endlessly along, you hosts of song !

DIONYSUS AND APOLLO

DIONYSUS from India straying

Runs fast through the low marsh-towns :
His mænads dishevelled run after
Yelping like bloodthirsty hounds.

Apollo sits high on a summit

And looks on the glittering range.
He dreams that pale Daphne he follows,
Though to bitter-sweet laurel she change.

The wine is thy life-blood, O Bromius,

But my blood is sorrow and song.
You offer me life, and hot folly,
When I want cold glory and wrong.

If I weep not a sob shall escape me,

If I kiss not a kiss shall I waste.
I shall fashion grape-clusters of singing
But no single grape shall I taste :

Dionysus I shall not follow,

Too drowsy and dull is his wine.
I shall sit on the heights with Apollo,
And be taught of the sacred Nine.

THE POET'S CHARACTER

HE is one drunken with monotonous wine
Of rhyme divine and undivine :
Who seeing all things scarcely shows
He sees to the end of his own nose :
Who hates the thing he loves, and makes
A passion of the thing he hates :
Who in the mountains seeks the plain :
And in the sun desires the rain :
Who flashes on life's evil flood
Transient gleams of joyful good :
Who lives in the north, and loves the south,
And gainsays the song from his own mouth.
Life is his death and death may be
More of life than he ever may see ;
Hell is his Heaven : should he dwell
In Heaven itself, 'twould be his Hell.

THE POET'S DESIRE

I WOULD not sing one song, but many a strain
expressing

The steeps of the sky and the lowest depths of
the gutter.

I would put all the tones this world can utter
Into my voice, the rhythm proudly stressing
Until the stars stood still to listen to that song,
Ever ascending afresh, new and sublime and strong.

I would not be a single string low-throbbing
To a few sick souls in a lamplit hospital staying,
But the great harp of the world, shaking with
laughter and sobbing,

Under the sky to all the wind's wild playing.

If my strings soon break, what matter? the Maker
of song

May stretch then some other strings than mine ; more
new, more strong !

POETIC ART

Ask not a purpose of all things,
No dogma with fixed mind debate,
But loose each mood to beat its wings
Freely against the bars of fate.

Welcome each sorrow with full heart,
As freely as you welcome bliss ;
Never to flinch is the best art,
And to receive all, giving is.

ON AN EDITOR'S REFUSAL OF MY POEMS

Who knows in acid-bitten bronze to scrape
His thought he need not fear to die unknown :
His immortality he cannot 'scape ;
He rests, as rests the steel-grey granite stone.

Resisting shallow change, resisting death,
His song pours ever into earth unheard ;
The great sigh of the myriads taking breath,
He knows it his : and that is his reward.

Not his to count the chink of coins, or worse,
To waste his time in remedying Fame's wrong ;
For all the wild force of the universe
Bursts from his soul, shaking his strings to song.

TO THE PUBLISHER WHO REFUSED TO
PUBLISH MY POEMS

Those who fall shattered with joy at their own fate,
Those who lie stricken with arrows of the sun,
Those who die smiling and smiting : were but one
Of those men here, he now might hail me great.

Those to whom every pulse is an affray,
Those to whom all holds evil and misery,
Those who have lost all purpose, yet dare be :
Those are my readers, those ! And only they.

Those who have leapt in leaping flame of wrongs,
Laden with fuel to make it blaze yet higher,
A rending, wrecking, devastating fire :
Those are my followers. Go, read their songs.

Now though I live or die, it matters not.
I see great cliffs of granite clothed in sun,
And up those cliffs I climbed apart, alone.
It is enough. The rest of me can rot.

THE POET'S AUTUMN

My boyhood passed like a storm in Spring,
My youth, like a vague calm summer's day :
But ended now is all my play,
For Autumn's frost has pierced my soul,
And my pulses leap beneath its sting.

Pinnacles of incomplete rhyme
I will rear up to catch the sun
Higher than any man has done :
There will I seize faint arrowy beams
Of that infinite light that erratically streams
Through the transfixed bounds of space and time,
And I will fling them towards the deep
Where the azure fishes sleep,
To spear some vagrant thought or rhyme.

The springtime of my life is now left behind me,
And summer's glowing peace shall not return
again.
But the clarions of the Autumn, sombre and sonorous,
wind me :
Forth, go forth to the sunset's sumptuous pain ;
On to the fury of the rain !

THE POET'S IMMORTALITY

No speck of mine can ever pass from earth ;
When I am dead I shall relive my pain
More violently, more exultantly. Again
I suffer, die. Again I pass through birth.

Even my lightest dust about earth blown,
Men shall consume with eager, greedy lips ;
From clown to monarch, knave to saint, it slips ;
All then my own and nothing then my own.

And when the earth at last is dead, and night's
Brusque curtain cuts in two my latest scene,
By some collision with a world unseen,
I shall awake before the old footlights.

Ask you perchance for joy's last ecstasy,
Seek you apart for sorrow's bitter wine,
Would you at one with good or evil be ?
I ask naught, seek naught, need naught. All is
mine.

LINES TO THE ADMIRERS OF ALFRED
STEVENS

*(On the occasion of the Memorial Exhibition of his
Works)*

YES, take the fragments from the wreck
Of this great soul who was your slave,
So long as these your gallery deck,
What more reward need art to crave ?

Take every broken, battered shape
Which a man, 'spite misfortune foul,
Sought to create for tailless ape
But could not, for such have no soul :

Treasure them well, now he is dead !
And scatter—precious gift—your tears
Over that beauty which has fled
Uncaught for ever, down the years.

But in the meantime, on the street
Let other genius starve ! 'Tis just.
An act most worshipful and meet,
To spurn red life and pray to dust.

Better, I say, be art accurst !
For I am sure your souls are dead,
Being stillborn in you from the first,
Since it was money that you wed.

O let him sleep beyond distress :
 Beyond the pity and the praise
Of all your paltry penny press :
 And the futility of days !

TO THE PUBLIC

I do not condescend to you :

'Tis to myself I condescend,
For you are not. You have no end
Nor being, but what I endue—

'Tis this, this clay doll of a day,
My breath has huddled together so ;
This me, which you can see and know,
That basely would its Father slay.

For Godhood only knows the void,
Yet yearns for life, and finding it,
Life finds that Godhood does not fit,
Being precious, with a stuff alloyed ;

So all my moments are a crime,
And all are as idle as all breath,
Which lasts through endless empty time,
Seeking an empty song of death.

PRESENT-DAY POETRY

BUT yesterday the poets
Ere they could dare to sing,
Must find the one thing needful ;
A mighty voice to ring :

But we have changed that evil,
And all is now once more
As if no voice attempted
In song to rise and soar.

To-day, we have no singers :
For our doting eyes are cast
On two colossal phantoms,
The future, and the past.

In the cause of reform and progress
We have burnt to-day at the stake ;
She may pray or she may shudder,
For the past, or the future's sake.

If you would be a poet,
These words will save you strife :
The one, sole thing you need is
A philosophy of life !

CLOWN'S SONG

“Who can speak the crimes of rhyming?”

Said a poet. Well he knew
What this vile and senseless chiming
Tempts a singer's soul to do :

How it alters his rude power,
Nature's firstborn rhythm vast,
Into trifles for an hour
Cheap and vulgar, first to last !

How it changes his swift dancing,
Pause and whirl of tireless feet,
Into capers unentrancing,
Cut for pennies on the street.

Or if all the gold of Indies
Could not tempt him to such shame,
Deeper yet the poet's sin lies :
He is jingling but for fame :

Idol made of gilded paper,
Crammed inside with chaff and bran,
Fit to dolt the foolish gaper,
Fit only to be kicked by man !

Whether gold or fame, no matter
Which I serve, it is the same,
For my castanets I clatter,
Bawl some vulgar song of shame

In a voice that cracks and falters ;
And I tumble on my head
In this garb that nothing alters,
Clown-costume of white and red.

People laugh and think me funny,
Deem my face a mirthful sight.
When I go 'round for the money,
Then they scatter, left and right !

THE PRICE OF POETRY

WHAT is your need, poet,
What is your need ?
“ To grow many songs
From a little thought-seed :
Blossoming myriads,
Flower and weed.”

You are mad indeed, poet,
You are mad indeed :
When all these have blossomed,
What is your meed ?
Drink, lust, starvation,
By these you are freed.

ART'S SACRIFICES

POETS can only hear,
 So they glasses wear ;
Painters can only see,
 Deaf they always are ;
Sculptors can only feel,
 So they have no mind ;
Musicians can only sing,
 They are deaf and dumb and blind.

FATIGUE

SING, O ye poets, sing on,
Of golden summer's gales ;
Of patented magic casements,
And copyright nightingales !
'Gainst all these harmless follies
I do not stir up strife,
I am only weary of two things,
And these are—death and life.

THE DREAM OF ART

To-NIGHT I am very weary,
And depressed at heart.
I will revive an old fancy,
The healing illusion of art.

Some liquor brewed by monks
In the depths of a tomb-like cell,
Amid old skulls and tombstones,
This shall poison me well :

So that a blazing hall
Up in my brain shall rise ;
With musicians assembled,
And a thousand watching eyes.

There the violins shall sob,
And the long trombones roar.
The drums shall thump and throb,
And the vast tone-poem soar.

Tschaikowsky, Mozart, Strauss,
Shall revel, revolt and sing ;
Or weep : while at the end
The wild applause shall ring.

And so long as those liquid fires
 Within my soul yet shine,
I will dream that dream of madness,
 The dream which is divine :

But the strings snap soon and the fiddles
 Wabble, all out of tune ;
The horns grunt, and the flutes shriek,
 And hoots the grim bassoon.

The conductor breaks his baton ;
 The tears run down his face.
The lights go out : the audience
 Clump noisily from their place.

Thus I must pay the reckoning
 For dreaming that dream again
Sick and pallid and aching,
 I wake to the same old pain.

A DISTANT SONG

WHETHER awake or sleeping,
I cannot rest for long :
By my casement comes creeping
A distant song.

A song like the chiming of silver
Bells which the breezes play,
Seeming to float for ever
Towards an unseen day :

A song that is weary with sorrow,
Yet knows not any defeat :
Through the past, through to-day, through to-morrow,
It echoes on life's long street.

Could I but make words of its power,
Bring it from the future here,
Men's souls would be waking, that hour,
To the victory against fear.

But the vague sweet stanza befools me
With its calm joy, time after time,
And no failure here ever schools me
To cease from an idle rhyme.

That music afar, unspoken,
 'Tis I have done it wrong :
I caught, and I have broken,
 A distant song.

DREAM-POETRY

I OFTEN think that poets never have sung
Beauty but with a dull and stammering tongue :
That only in dim wonderlands of sleep
To which the key is lost, in drowsing deep,
Is art transformed from out a broken cry
To an immortal, effortless ecstasy.

ART

FAR on the chill and gloomy fen
Alone, unmoved, Art stands ;
An image fashioned not by men,
She lifts her shining hands :
The mists part, and we see her then,
And we come from many lands.

The waters dabble at her feet,
And around them, the ashen slime
Stretches, even as it was when time
Was not, nor her beauty sweet
Was frozen to marble thus
To be the delight of us :
To stand so lonely-white on high
Under the autumn evening sky.

All our desire for her is plain :
We are her lovers, only fain
The waters from her feet to keep
A little longer,—from swallowing deep
To hold her pure and lofty still,—
It is our pride, our hope, our skill,
Flinging ourselves in the marsh-pools bare,
Greatest or least, to sacrifice
Each precious instant, ere it dies,
To her sublime despair !

She rests on a mighty plinth of bones :
 These are the proudly happy ones.
Victims accepted, their work done,
 Within her glory they live on.
Their names are long forgotten, as the chime
 Of last year's bells, or an unspoken rhyme,
And those large eyes droop not from dreams on high
To comfort anyone who comes to die.

In the long evening, grey and cool,
 Like a phantom of mist she is.
From each bleak sedge-bordered pool
 The frogs bemock her bliss.
They croak their distaste of this great
Austere image of a fate
 Which they must ever miss :

She heeds them not, through day and night ;
 And we sleep on, being well content,
 Each with another's spirit blent,
Hidden and safe from any sight ;
 Alone to *her* the vision's sent,
The glory and the might !

TO THE MUSE

O STERN and lofty Muse,
That long hast fled the earth,
Scorning the acts of men
Loveless and base of worth :

I still, through smoke and dust,
Through misery and pain,
Longingly look aloft
To the shrine without a stain

I ask not for a song :
No pearl for husk-fed swine ;
Nor any earthly gift,
But a splendid deed divine !

O stern and lofty Muse,
Take thou my soul away
From this foul pit of death,
To the white fire of day.

THE POET

I

I AM a poet.—Dusky image wrought
After long years within the fires of thought :
Leaving my ancient dross to feed the mire,
And offering up my pure gold to the fire.

Alike to those who tread my vestiture,
And those who wipe its stain, I am serene :
I know the meaning of each strange, wild scene ;
And every chasm cross with footstep sure.

I am a poet and a mystery,
Each day myself as in a glass I see :
Creator and created fused in one,
Sun that makes night and night that drinks the sun.

TIME AND POET

ONWARD I move, at one with flying Time,
 Borne like a bubble down the resistless stream
Changing yet constant, like a poet's rhyme,
 Containing all, reality and dream.

No more than hours, days, seasons, do I wait :
I watch the terrible spectacle of fate,
 The suns, like kindled matches, flash and fall.
And if too soon I find the hour grown late,
Too soon Time moves without me, hesitate
 Or pause, I cannot : I am part of all.

For if the bubble soon is burst, the stream
 Flies on with newer bubbles, endless Time !
And Time's am I : reality and dream
 Move me to silence or an idle rhyme.

THE POET

II

My body was once a beautiful house of marble,
Kissed to pale rose by the passionate heat of the
sun,

Wherein through cunning channels flowed forever
Health-giving crimson blood in steady tides.

My eyes were then quick to see and to welcome
beauty,

My lips smiled often with gratified desire,
My hands shook not, but were fit for caress or
grapple,
My arms rose and my body moved in strength.

Then not a single line of any poem
Had my hands raped from my brain, but un-
touched and pure

They abode in the land of distant visions where no
man
Heard my voice calling for them at eventide.

My blood lies in great black lakes now, sluggish and
frozen,

Or fumes in like some boiling, stinging, poison brew
Till it suddenly stops in a lassitude unspoken,
Or bursts through my pores and covers me with
red dew :

My eyes are bleared now and dull with sleepless
midnights,
My lips are like shrunken purses—their gold is
spent,
My hands unsteadily clutch and paw and tremble,
My arms are as strings of macaroni bent.

And as for my chest, 'tis like a leaky air-box
Fixed to some cheap melodeon out of tune,
The bellows creak, the loose and brown keys rattle,
And the music that comes is like a dog's sick
moan.

But in my brain there seethes an adulterous
hotchpotch
Of poems clean and disgusting, mad and sage ;
And pain, like a dry fire, keeps them ever a-boiling
Till they splash over and blacken some wasted
page.

Yes, I am a poet now to be mocked and applauded,
A turnspit that turns and must never taste the
meat :
Behold how great I am, but I wait for a greater,
Even Death, who will silence the march of these
crippled feet.

THE TRIUMPH OF SONG

WHATEVER the past has given
Of bitterness and woe,
Whatever the days to follow
Of pain have left to show :

Still onward song is streaming,
And after every wrong
More great and more triumphant
Grows the need of life for song.

For it is everlasting :
It passes not away.
The earth herself is singing
As she whirls through night and day.

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